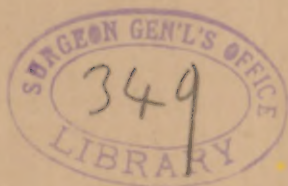


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THE
Treatment of Epithelioma
with Mild Caustics.

BY
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HOSPITAL.

Read before the
New York Dermatological Society.



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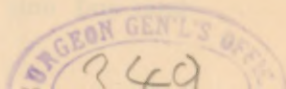
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STATISTICS from the London Cancer Hospital from 1851 to 1872, show that of 8,579 cases of cancer, 2,010, or more than twenty-five per cent., were surface epitheliomata.

Next to scirrhus tumors then come these cases, which, whether properly or not, have been considered within the field of dermatology. Although what I shall claim to be the effect of mild caustic application applies with greater force to the more malignant varieties, such as epithelioma of the tongue, rectum and cervix uteri, it is to those directly affecting the skin to which attention is directed in this paper.

It is well to consider briefly some of the characters belonging to this group. The majority of patients are men, and in most cases the disease is located in some portion of the face, the side of the nose, on a level with the angle of the eye being so frequently affected as to be almost justly termed the point of



selection for these cases. The disease seldom begins until middle age has been passed, when the vital forces are declining, and some local irritation is often the exciting cause in this locality, as is almost invariably the case in cancer of the lips. During the past year I have treated one which developed in the callosity resulting from the pressure or rather pinching of eye-glasses, and also another epithelioma occurring on the dorsum of the nose, where an old-fashioned spectacle bow had rested for many years.

The disease spreads in the direction where it meets the least resistance, that usually being in the skin only, the underlying tissues becoming very slowly affected. Even the eyeball often resists the disease until both the lower and the upper lids have been destroyed. The *natural* course of the disease is exceedingly slow except in those parts composed of loose, non-resisting tissues, such as the lip, vulva, penis and scrotum.

Virchow says of it that "it remains for a long time local, so that the nearest lymphatic glands often do not become affected until after the lapse of years, and then again the process is for a long time confined to the disease of the lymphatic glands, so that a general outbreak of the disease in all parts of the body does not take place until late, and only in rare instances."

The photograph of the patient, I here present, shows the progress of the disease in seventeen years, *without any medical or surgical interference whatever*, which is the most remarkable part of his history to me, for we very seldom see a case of cancer for which something has not been ordered by a physician, or some better qualified person, to promote a cure.



In comparing the characters just enumerated with those of cancer of other organs than the skin, it becomes apparent that these superficial, slowly in-

fectious, and I might add nearly painless affections, are naturally the most curable of all the cancerous diseases. I say *naturally* the most curable, because, as we find these cases in practice, they are very often *deep* in surrounding tissues, *rapidly* infecting neighboring lymphatic glands, giving rise to *considerable* pain, and *rapidly* advancing to a fatal termination, and all this the result, as I believe, of the mild cauterization which is employed in nearly every instance in the early history of the case

By the term mild cauterization, I mean all caustic applications of whatever kind which aim at a *gradual* destruction of the diseased tissue. A few cases will illustrate my meaning. A young man of thirty years consulted a physician about one year ago for a "cracked" lip which had troubled him two or three months. During the next six months eighty applications were made to the lip, so the patient says, of a caustic answering to the description of nitrate of silver. The result is the entire lower lip cancerous, an enormous tumor on the left side of the face and inferior maxillary region, which has ulcerated in several places, and the "cancer cachexia" of the older writers indicates an early fatal termination. This very unusual glandular infection can only be accounted for by the fact, as I believe, that the repeated applications

acted in the same manner as the local irritation which is so often the exciting cause of the primary disease.

An old lady, who was under my care while I was connected with Dr. Bulkley's service at the Skin and Cancer Hospital, suffered from an epithelioma of the ala nasi on the right side, and a small one on the cheek of the opposite side. The latter was thoroughly removed by curetting, after which a strong pyrogallic acid ointment (3 iv-3 i) was applied for three days and the ulcer healed without delay and never recurred. The *curetting* removed *all* the disease, and the ointment, acting as a stimulant to the surrounding blood supply, actually hastened the granulation process.

The larger epithelioma on the nose was curetted, the ointment applied and the disease sprung up anew. The strength of the ointment was increased until the pure acid was several times applied, and finally, after months of the most faithful trial of the plan I ever witnessed, the case was treated surgically and a prompt cure rapidly effected.

In this latter instance *all* the disease was not removed by the curette, and the mild caustic application stimulated the growth of the remaining cancer elements.

In a large number of cases which I have observed,

where the pyrogallol was used, the same unsatisfactory results followed, so that, in my judgment, it can only be useful in those semi-malignant ulcers of the skin which have no elevated or indurated borders, while in the ordinary epitheliomata its use is not alone useless but positively injurious.

The successes with pyrogallol and resorcín are so exceptional that their use in such cases should be discarded altogether.

Nitrate of silver is one of the most frequent of mild applications and also one of the most injurious. It is probable that no epithelioma of the tongue ever escaped an application of this remedy, and it is equally certain that no case was ever benefited thereby.

Without multiplying instances of such meddling treatment, let us consider the effects of such applications upon the healthy skin. The epidermal layers are promptly destroyed; but as *they* contain no power to carry diseased cells into surrounding tissues, their safety or destruction does not concern us now. The changes in the true skin are those belonging to simple inflammation, viz.; hyperæmia with engorgements of the affected parts with blood, swelling, redness, pain, often œdema resulting from stasis in the vessels, and *increased activity* in the tissues, with tendency to new products.

WITH MILD CAUSTICS.

It cannot be doubted that the blood vessels and lymphatics are absolutely essential to a healthy propagation, if I may use the term, of the cancer elements in the skin as elsewhere in the body. In the case represented by the photograph, œdema of the upper lid caused by the destruction of its blood supply at the angles of the eye, was an insurmountable barrier to the progress of the disease in that direction for many years.

Given an area of skin infiltrated with malignant disease, and then stimulate all the activities of adjacent tissues, and only one result can follow—a greater degree of activity to the diseased area. This brings us to the laying down of this proposition, justified by experience as well as philosophy :

No mild caustic application should ever be made to any cancerous surface under any circumstances.

Only such caustics are admissible as *completely and rapidly* destroy the diseased tissues ; such remedies destroy the vessels and lymphatics adjoining and so prevent dissemination of cancer elements.

An exception should possibly be made in favor of one mild remedy, the galvanic current.

Julius Althaus recommended its use in a paper published in 1869, and several writers have since advised its use in these cases, prominent among whom was the late Dr. Beard of this city. It is not as a

caustic, however, but by the chemical action of the negative pole, attached to a five-celled battery, that a marked change in the diseased tissue has been affected which terminated in complete cure in several instances. My own experience is too limited to enable me to express an opinion, but a few applications, made by Dr. Fox in a lower lip which was extensively diseased, caused a very decided softening and shrinking of the growth. The case is an incurable one, or I would insist upon a very thorough trial of the remedy.

